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Tuesday, 7 December 1993 at 10 a.m.

NEW YORK

President: Mr. INSANALLY (Guyana)

The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

AGENDA ITEM 20

FORTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY OF THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

ANNOUNCEMENT REGARDING THE AWARD OF HUMAN RIGHTS PRIZES

The PRESIDENT: I should like to remind members that, in accordance with the decision taken by the General Assembly at its 3rd plenary meeting, the ceremony for the award of human-rights prizes in 1993 will be held on Friday, 10 December 1993, on the occasion of the celebration of the forty-fifth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Special Committee established under recommendation C of the annex to resolution 2217 A (XXI) of 19 December 1966 to select the winners of the human-rights prizes decided to recommend to the General Assembly that the number of prizes this year be increased to nine.

If there is no objection to that proposal, I shall take it that nine prizes for outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms are to be awarded this year.

It was so decided.

PROGRAMME OF WORK

The PRESIDENT: It is my intention to take up the reports of the Sixth Committee on Thursday, 9 December, in the afternoon; reports of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee (the Fourth Committee) on Friday, 10 December, in the afternoon; the reports of the First Committee on Thursday, 16 December, in the afternoon; and the reports of the Third Committee on Monday, 20 December, in the morning.

AGENDA ITEM 109

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY

LAUNCHING OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE FAMILY: REPORT OF THE SECRETARY-GENERAL (A/48/293)

The PRESIDENT: This morning the General Assembly, in accordance with a decision taken at its 3rd plenary meeting, will launch the International Year of the Family.

At the outset of our proceedings today, I propose to make a brief statement as President of the Assembly.

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ENGLISH

By proclaiming 1994 the International Year of the Family, the General Assembly decided to draw the world's attention to that most fundamental of social institutions: the family.

Today's realities remind us of the importance of families as basic units of society, performing such vital functions as the rearing of children, caring for the vulnerable, providing emotional and material support for their members and generally serving as the pillars of entire communities. Families, moreover, play a major economic role in contributing to the development of a productive population. It has been said, in fact, that if we want better people to make a better world, we should begin where people are made: in the family.

At this critical juncture in history, the institution of the family is under constant siege. As economies recede, unemployment raises its ugly head, denying breadwinners of the home the resources necessary for the care and comfort of their charges. Worse yet, with changing values, moral degradation has set in, bringing in its wake such evils as crime, drugs, disease and violence. There is therefore an urgent need to arrest these growing social problems. For these reasons, Governments would be best advised to formulate appropriate policies to enable families to adapt to the demands of change and thus remain the bedrock of our civilization.

Since the Year was proclaimed, we have witnessed the launching of an intensive, coordinated and effective preparatory process, which has set in motion a series of substantive promotional activities around the globe. The Secretary-General's report (A/48/293) on the subject indicates that progress made so far augurs well for a successful observance of the Year. I wish to reiterate the Assembly's appreciation to the Secretary-General, already expressed in resolution 47/237, for advancing the cause of the family, notwithstanding the many complexities of the question and the resource constraints of the United Nations itself.

The preparatory process has served to orient the Year's activities for the promotion of human rights to the benefit of the family. A consistent effort has been made to focus on activities at the national and the local levels and to support them in every possible manner. The series of four regional preparatory meetings for the Year has mobilized wide support for national action programmes and has forged a global consensus on the important role of families. Those meetings have confirmed that many of the issues of concern to families and, by extension, to national Governments, are indeed universal. The international community must therefore come together with a unity of purpose to strengthen the basic foundation on which it is built: the human family.

I should like to pay a tribute to the numerous International Year of the Family partners at all levels - Governments, non-governmental organizations and individuals - that have contributed to the furtherance of the principles and objectives of the Year. A special word of appreciation is due the concerned United Nations bodies and agencies whose task it is to execute the many policies and programmes designed to enhance family welfare.

As we meet today in observance of this very special Year, let us remember that in advancing the concept of the family as the smallest democracy at the heart of society, we shall be helping to build a world in which peace and development can best flourish. We must therefore strive to ensure that the institution of the family not only survives but is also greatly strengthened.

I am now pleased to invite the Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, to address the Assembly.

The SECRETARY-GENERAL: The family is the oldest and the most basic unit of human organization. It is the link between generations. It helps to carry and to transmit culture. It sustains the disadvantaged. It provides for those in need. Families mould and feed us. We rely upon their *esprit de corps*, their solidarity, their support.

Today it is with great pleasure that I join with you in the launching of 1994 as the International Year of the Family. This proclamation signals an important and meaningful commitment by the international community. For the first time, the United Nations pays tribute to the special needs and importance of the family. Through this undertaking, we show our commitment to preserving the integrity of the family; we show our determination to enhance the capacity of families to thrive in the modern world.

The International Year of the Family celebrates the contribution of the family to human life in all of its aspects. In doing so, it also reminds us that families everywhere are struggling to cope with the impact of change.

Action in support of the family is required. Greater sensitivity to the needs of families must be achieved. Promoting a greater awareness of the problems facing the family is where we must now begin.

There is no single definition of a family. There is no one model. The diversity of society is fully reflected in

the diversity of our families. We celebrate the family in all of its many cultural and social forms. We strive to enhance its vitality - a vitality that comes from the sense of community that families create.

In emphasizing the importance of the family, however, we do not detract from the priority placed on individual rights. Support for the family must not come at the expense of each person's human rights. Support for the family is not an alternative to or a way around these rights.

Indeed, our focus on the role of the family must also take into account the many responsibilities of families. Children have the right to be fed and protected within the family. Women have the right to be respected within the family, and the right to be allowed to contribute their full talents to society. The disabled are entitled to have access to the means of reaching their full potential.

It is my hope that this Year will lead to action on behalf of the family. We must ensure that it also serves as a positive initiative for human dignity and human rights.

In the change and confusion of the modern world, families are sources of stability and promise. Families can help to bridge ethnic and political divisions. They can enhance economic potential. They can promote social welfare and social responsibility.

Politically, by forging links between communities, families help promote tolerance. By building closer ties between peoples, families deepen understanding throughout society.

Economically, by creating a wider pool of human and financial resources, families promote economic progress. Through economic cooperation, families achieve together what their individual members could not achieve alone.

Socially, by caring for family members, and by teaching positive social behaviour, families promote greater social welfare.

In all these respects, families are resources of great strength and nearly unlimited potential. They are a force for progress, a counterweight to alienation, and a defence against breakdown and disorder.

Despite these strengths, families everywhere are under pressure. In some countries, the rates of family disintegration are a cause for genuine alarm. In other countries, negative pressures on families have weakened their cohesiveness. Family support mechanisms have been seriously undermined.

War and political conflict are widespread today, and they exact a heavy toll. Separation and loss physically threaten family cohesion. Trauma and displacement inflict overwhelming emotional distress.

Economically, unplanned development disrupts traditional patterns of family life. Industrial strategies are often pursued with little regard for their impact upon the family. The inability of some families to provide for themselves weakens family cohesion and undermines self-respect.

Socially, too rapid urbanization disrupts family relations and family-based social systems. Elsewhere, the fear of crime and a pervasive atmosphere of violence make normal family life impossible.

Unfortunately, the policies and actions of Governments and of international organizations sometimes add to the strains that families are already experiencing. Programmes are often launched with little consideration for how they may affect the capacity or integrity of families. Social welfare services sometimes incorporate disincentives to the exercise of family responsibility. Families are sometimes required to make unfair choices between family cohesion and needed services.

Economically, taxation policies in many countries actually provide incentives for people to live apart rather than together. Little effort is made to include families in development strategies, and family enterprises are rarely considered in the context of economic development initiatives.

(spoke in French)

We must together make every effort to think of the family in radically new terms. To accord better recognition to the role that the family unit plays in the development of contemporary society, to strengthen the functions of the family, to enhance its role, to strive for its development: those are the tasks before us. For the family is not only the basic structure of social life; it is also at the very centre of the development process with which we are entrusted.

To envisage the future of the planet is also in a way to imagine the future of the family structure.

From the perspective of development, if we are trying to think of new links of solidarity, the family unit can again serve as a model and an inspiration.

Through family customs, we can redefine the quality of life, change our consumption habits and continue working towards viable and lasting economic development.

But the family does not only have economic functions in today's world; it also has important social functions. In particular, the family context must make it possible to ensure full equality for women. In this connection, I would like to ask Governments and all others concerned to make every effort to increase the opportunities given to women, in the true spirit of the International Year of the Family.

The International Year that is now beginning affords a unique opportunity for mobilizing all our efforts to highlight the importance of the family. May this awareness encourage Governments to take the necessary measures to ensure the well-being of families.

May the image of the family be an example to make us understand that all of us within the international community are members of the family of nations, the great human family. That is to say, we are members of an Organization which knows how to face the difficulties of the moment, to overcome apparent divisions, to surmount antagonisms, because it is led by a force more powerful than any other: the force of love, which in the final analysis is the *raison d'être* of the family.

The PRESIDENT: I now call on the Secretary of Health and Human Services of the United States of America, who will speak on behalf of the host country.

Ms. SHALALA (United States of America): Mr. President, Mr. Secretary-General, fellow delegates, distinguished guests and members of non-governmental organizations, it is my honour to speak to you as the representative of the host country. As always, the United States regards it as a privilege to host representatives from all parts of the world here at the United Nations General Assembly.

I salute the United Nations for designating 1994 as the International Year of the Family.

We have come here today because we recognize a fundamental truth: the family in all its forms is the cornerstone of our world community.

Those of us who live on this continent are now rediscovering a great deal about the family and the community from Native American culture. In that culture, the concept of the family includes the immediate family, the extended family, the community and even the natural world. Each newborn baby is presented to the community and given a name. At that time, a proclamation is made describing the baby's relationship to the family and to the members of the community. These bonds hold families together and are everlasting. This tradition enriches us all.

There are many more traditions of the family around the globe. Today we are seeing many types of caring, supportive families. Some families have two parents in the home. Some are headed by a single parent. Some are headed by a grandparent or an extended relative. And, as our populations age, we are seeing more and more households that include older relatives.

But all strong families have certain things in common. They are all based on love and commitment. They all nurture and educate children. They all teach respect for others and for one's self. And they all preserve and pass on the rich cultural traditions of the past, while teaching hope for the future.

However, if we are to give the families of tomorrow a future worthy of their dreams we must meet tough challenges today. Right now, we are facing a deadly threat that has claimed victims on every continent, in every corner of this Earth.

That threat, of course, is AIDS. AIDS is devastating families. It is orphaning thousands of children and it is increasing dramatically among children and adolescents around the world.

Conservatively, the World Health Organization projects that by the year 2000 a world total of 30 million to 40 million people will have been infected with HIV since the start of the pandemic. By the end of the 1990s there will be nearly one and a half million adult AIDS deaths each year, the majority in developing countries.

The Clinton Administration is committed to a global approach to AIDS. We have met with AIDS activists. We have increased funding for AIDS research and treatment. And we are treating AIDS not as a moral issue, but as a deadly disease that attacks without discrimination, regardless of race, gender, age, sexual preference or lifestyle, and regardless of where one lives in this world.

Our country is also thinking globally about reproductive health. We believe that families must have the freedom to choose when, and how many, children they bring into the world. And we believe that women in the United States should be able to govern their own bodies.

Many families lack access to reproductive health care. In developing countries, this leads to such terrible health

risks as unhealthy women, hungry children and impoverished families.

President Clinton is showing our commitment to making family planning available. We have restored funding to the International Planned Parenthood Federation. We are making an equally strong commitment to the United Nations Population Fund.

We must also meet the challenge of caring for the many children who are left orphaned by war, disease and poverty. All over the world young people are growing up without the nurturing words of a parent, without the encouragement they need to develop, and without the irreplaceable feeling of being part of a family. We must provide for their futures and build on the outstanding leadership of the non-governmental organizations in providing for people in need.

Another challenge we face is that of increasing economic security for our families. President Clinton is committed to creating jobs in the United States and to working with other nations to stimulate global prosperity. We know that an improved global economy means jobs. It also means shelter. It means nourishment. It means education. It means dealing with demographic change and committing ourselves to peace.

If we are to create a future worthy of our children we all have to be citizens of the world; we all have to bring a global vision to the decisions we make; and we have to feel a sense of personal responsibility for all the people and all the countries with which we share this beautiful and fragile planet.

Here in the United States we are the beneficiaries of great global diversity. Our shores continue to provide sanctuary and opportunity to families and children from all over the world. Many cultures now make up American life and the tradition of family.

I want to make clear that we value all families. All of our initiatives are aimed at helping families, from immunizing all pre-school children to launching a comprehensive anti-violence effort, from providing health care for every American to moving poor families into the work force, from supporting programmes that keep families together to passing new laws that let workers care for sick family members without losing their jobs.

I know that many of you are facing similar challenges in your countries. We must work together to find common solutions to common problems, to ensure that all families in every country have freedom, health, security and opportunity.

In the next two years the United Nations will hold three important international conferences: on social development, on the needs of women and on population and development. Those conferences address issues that will have a profound impact on all of our families in the years to come. The International Year of the Family should serve as a constant reminder to all of us to think about the needs of families as we do our jobs, this year and every year.

Yesterday in Washington President Clinton issued a proclamation declaring 1994 the International Year of the Family. On that occasion, he said:

> "By honouring families we are acknowledging the crucial role they play in developing the character of our collective communities - on the local, national and global levels. Each family's unique traditions and teachings blend together to build the very foundation upon which we, as an international family, have grown and will continue to grow."

To go back now to the Native American tradition, the Lakota Indians offer a blessing that signifies strong relationship. That blessing is three simple words: "All my relations." So today, on behalf of the people of the United States of America, I offer you and your citizens the same warm wishes. You are all my relations.

The PRESIDENT: I now call upon the President Director-General of the National Office of Family and Population of Tunisia and Chairman of the Organizing Committee of the Africa and Western Asia Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family, which was held in Tunisia.

Mr. BOUKHRIS (Tunisia) *(interpretation from Arabic)*: Given the special importance the Republic of Tunisia attaches to the family and its concerns; in view of Tunisia's long and rich experience in the field of family policy, its structures and institutions, which have recently been developed both qualitatively and quantitatively, thus realizing one of the objectives of the new era; considering the special attention and daily follow-up the President of the Republic of Tunisia, His Excellency Mr. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and of the political leadership of the country devote to economic, social and cultural programmes in favour of the family, which programmes have helped achieve several results; and considering the place that the Tunisia of 7 November occupies in Africa and the Arab world as the meeting point of two civilizations, the United Nations, in preparation for the International Year of the Family and at the invitation of the Tunisian Government, organized, in collaboration with the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) and the Economic

and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the United Nations Africa and Western Asia Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family, which was held at Tunis, Tunisia, from 29 March through 2 April 1993. The Meeting was attended by representatives from 30 States members of ECA and 7 from ESCWA. Observers from a number of States, non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations and other competent agencies also attended together with representatives of the General Secretariat of the United Nations and some of its bodies.

In his opening address, the Prime Minister of Tunisia declared that the meeting represented an opportunity to exchange ideas, evaluate progress and discuss prospects for the future. He described the International Year of the Family as a mechanism to confront the problems families encounter at the national level and to reinforce the foundations of society. The Prime Minister added that the Tunisian Family Code reconciles traditional and progressive elements.

In a message addressed to the participants and read on his behalf, the United Nations Secretary-General called for the adoption of efficient measures to solve the extremely difficult problems of migrant families, refugees and other families with special needs. The Secretary-General also declared his solidarity with and support for actions in favour of the families of the world.

At its first session the Meeting elected as Chairman Dr. Nebiha Gueddana, the Tunisian Secretary of State to the Prime Minister in charge of Women's and Family Affairs, along with three Vice-Chairmen from Egypt, Swaziland and Guinea and two Rapporteurs from Lebanon and Cameroon. The Meeting also adopted the agenda and a draft organization of work. Agenda item 5 consisted of presentations of the situations of families in Africa and Western Asia; agenda item 6 was devoted to national and regional preparations for the International Year of the Family and agenda item 7 covered conclusions and recommendations on national and regional preparations for the celebration of the International Year of the Family and the follow-up thereto.

At its seventh session the Meeting adopted the report on its deliberations and the Declaration of Tunis. At that same session a non-governmental declaration was also adopted.

The Declaration of Tunis regards with great satisfaction the forward-looking policy of Tunisia and its President in favour of women and the family and reaffirms support for the United Nations for having declared 1994 the International Year of the Family. It expresses the hope that the International Year will afford us an opportunity to implement programmes aimed at ensuring cohesion, solidarity, justice, prosperity, well-being and peace to all the families of the world.

The Declaration also stressed that the family needs special care and attention and protection and maximum assistance if it is to discharge fully its responsibilities in conformity with the aims of the charters of the United Nations, the African States and the Arab League in terms of human rights, the promotion of woman's cause and the drive to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

The Tunis Declaration also highlighted the need for ensuring the implementation of and respect for a number of fundamental principles, namely respect for the rights and freedoms of the individual; rejection of all forms of violence, intolerance and religious bigotry, and sincere positive cooperation between peoples and nations. It also invited all Governments to pay special attention to rural families in developing countries, migrant families, poor families, the education of children and the responsibilities of parents therein. In addition, it asked all decision-makers to elaborate adequate legislation on the family and on ensuring equality for women and requested the international community to condemn injustice and all kinds of aggression, repression, violence and discrimination. It called on all the countries of the world to formulate strategies and policies to support the family, and to present such strategies and policies to the international community during the International Year of the Family.

I should like now to deal with the conclusions and recommendations of the meeting. After examination of the role of the family in both regions, and taking into account the national and regional activities in preparation of the International Year of the Family, the participants in the United Nations Africa and Western Asia preparatory meeting for the International Year adopted 43 conclusions and recommendations on family policy and the International Year, for presentation to Governments and organizations represented at this meeting for their examination and evaluation.

Those conclusions and recommendations deal with the following themes: family policy; economic functions of the family; economic and social security; demographic behavior; public services; the training of personnel providing services to families; the promotion of human rights; cultural strategy in the context of support for families; the protection of children; the promotion of women; the protection and promotion of disadvantaged and vulnerable family members; migrant and refugee families; family code and law; research in the field of family issues;

the proper management of family programmes; policies aimed at the prevention of future conflicts; and preparation for and follow-up to the International Year of the Family. Details of all these themes will be found in the relevant document.

Let me deal now with the situation of families in Africa and Western Asia. The document entitled "Impact of Social and Economic Changes on the African Family" describes programmes, functions and roles of the traditional African family; contains an analysis of the consequences of the African economic crisis of the 1980s; sets out structural-adjustment programmes; and deals with the impact of the socio-political evolution on the family.

The representative of ESCWA introduced a recent study entitled "The Impact of Socio-Economic Changes on the Arab Family". This study was based on the education and employment of Arab women as important factors in the promotion of Arab society. It also provided an abstract of the process of the transition of Arab society from traditionalism to modernism. It described the situation of the family in the labour-exporting countries of the region and analysed the changes in the functions of the family.

Other background papers dealt with the situation of the family in English-speaking and French-speaking countries of northern and western Africa. Most interventions and presentations dealt with the following issues: the role of the family; changes in the structure, functions and shape of the family; reproduction and health care for children; marriage and polygamy and efforts to curtail the latter; the importance of matters concerning women and their impact on the family; the emancipation and contribution of women; the elaboration of family policies in the social, economic and cultural contexts; the need to improve health services and education systems; the assumption by the State of the duty - set out in the constitution(s) and in legislation - to protect the family; personal-status codes; the revision and application of existing mechanisms; social problems, such as unemployment, the lack of education and delinquency; protection of the family as a social unit - a matter that all participants agreed was one of the main objectives of family policies - and the need for its being given the right to produce and educate children; the assurance of health care for everybody by the year 2000; food security; the establishment of global programmes of immunization and prevention; employment promotion; health care for handicapped and vulnerable people; the creation of social cohesion; the improvement of housing conditions; protection of the environment; migration to cities; the close correlation between family issues and population and the importance of the demographic component in family policy, especially in view of the fact that most of the countries of the region suffer from high demographic growth rates; the need to set up family-planning programmes and to improve the socio-economic conditions of families; the devastating impact on the family of civil wars and natural catastrophes; the problem of refugees and dispersion of members of the same family; and the disastrous effects of the acts of terrorism perpetrated in the name of traditionalist religious ideas.

Item 6 of the agenda - national and regional preparations for the International Year of the Family - was introduced by the Coordinator of the International Year, who mentioned major activities to celebrate the Year. These activities, which are crucial to the Year's success, are as follows: the organization of a campaign to promote awareness, among authorities, organizations and the general public, of the principles and objectives of the International Year of the Family; the adoption of family legislation based on international declarations and covenants; and the improvement and promulgation of national family policies.

The Coordinator mentioned also the importance of the exchange of information and experience in preparation for the celebration of the Year. All participants expressed satisfaction with the proclamation of the Year, considering it an excellent opportunity to develop public awareness of family issues. The meeting was informed of the institutional arrangements - those that have already been made and those that are under way - for the preparation and celebration of the Year. All participants agreed on the establishment of a national committees of coordination as a first step towards the celebration. In most countries these committees were chaired by important political figures, and they comprised representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations.

The active participation of non-governmental organizations and the need to involve all social sectors and categories in the committees were underscored.

Many representatives announced the adoption of national programmes of action for the family, women and children within the framework of the International Year of the Family. A number of participants stressed that the Year should not be an end in itself, but should be part of a long-term process in favour of the family.

At the closing ceremony, the Coordinator for the Year paid special tribute to a number of African and Western Asian representatives and coordinating committees for their exemplary contribution and support to the International Year of the Family.

All participants thanked the Government of Tunisia for its having generously hosted the meeting.

The PRESIDENT: I call next on His Excellency Mr. Louis Galea, Minister for Home Affairs and Social Development of Malta, Chairman of the Europe and North America Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family, which was held in Malta.

Mr. GALEA (Malta): Humankind has been shifting, with some discomfort, in its seat on this small planet in anxious self-examination, for it has much to reflect upon in terms of peace, social justice and environmental management. With the coming International Year of the Family, this self-examination has finally come to include the mechanism by which humankind reproduces itself and creates its future: the family.

I have the honour to report to the Assembly on behalf of the Europe and North America Preparatory Meeting, held in April this year, in relation to the forthcoming International Year of the Family. It was held in our capital city, Valletta - an appropriate choice, perhaps, in view of the international initiatives Malta has taken in the past to promote the rights of future generations. As part of Malta's own preparations for 1994, we also hosted and joined in organizing the World NGO Forum on Launching the International Year of the Family; that successful Forum took place only last week. Both occasions were organized with the full cooperation of the United Nations Office at Vienna under the able leadership of the Coordinator for the International Year of the Family, Mr. Henryk J. Sokalski, they served to renew my Government's commitment to participate actively in international political, social and economic activities that bear on the destiny of future generations, future families.

The family is always an intensely debated subject, both in intellectual and political circles, and at the local and the international levels. In a way, the emotions with which the family is discussed characterize the importance of families and the utmost consideration given to the family in all debating circles. The family is the smallest nurturing unit responsible for shaping tomorrow's society. If we envision a world of peace, justice and solidarity, then we have to ensure that today's families are empowered to nurture these values, which are shared within the international community. The debate on what constitutes a family becomes sterile if we do not ensure that violence, poverty, inequality, exploitation and oppression do not constitute the basis of our families. Otherwise we will be shaping a future that will mirror all that is negative in today's society.

I believe that the reflections the Secretary-General shared with us this morning are of great significance, as they constitute continued evidence of the emerging general consensus that any attempt to shape a better future for the international community must start with addressing the immediate concerns of today's families.

Those are my own beliefs and the basis of my country's family policy. We are not involved in some type of social engineering. However, we are involved in ensuring that the State play an active role in eliminating all the negative forces which influence this basic cell of our democracy, while supporting all the positive forces which enhance the family. We are, so to speak, in the family business, in full partnership with the families themselves, and in full partnership with the non-government sector, the importance of which was appropriately highlighted this morning by Mrs. Donna Shalala, Secretary of Health and Human Services of the United States.

The Valletta Declaration issued in April by the Europe and North America Preparatory Meeting represents a wide-ranging commitment to the family. At the level of social policy, this commitment includes promoting policies that enhance the quality of life for families and their members; considering social and economic policies in a holistic family perspective; and sharing information and other resources at the regional and international levels.

As regards work in and out of the home this regional commitment includes: humanizing conditions of work in accordance with the needs of the family and supporting the equal sharing of family functions.

As regards direct support to be given to various kinds of families by State and non-governmental organizations, the commitment includes: ensuring that there is education and information about parenting; providing support services for all families and individuals responsible for child-rearing; responding to the changing needs of families over their life-cycle; giving special consideration to families with special needs; and eliminating all forms of violence and abuse within families.

As members can see, the Governments of our region were concerned at this important event that policies towards the family should equip parents with skills and should be holistic, compassionate and responsive to special needs. This establishes a foundation for national, regional and international action. The Valletta Declaration invited the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations to encourage and support regional cooperation with regard to family matters. It invited policy-makers to integrate the objectives of the International Year of the Family into their work. And it

invites Member States to support other future international events of direct relevance to the family. It urged Governments to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to implement the measures specified in those instruments.

When we, as Governments or as individuals, discuss social welfare and individual responsibility, educational systems, taxation systems, law and order, or crime and punishment, we inevitably come to basic questions about the present and future of the family. And to face those questions we have to ask even more basic questions about the nature of the human experience.

During the Malta Preparatory Meeting we saw that there are various processes in which families are becoming different and sometimes more vulnerable; these generate a variety of family-related problems and a new awareness of these problems. Many of these problems themselves, and many of the debates about how these problems should be addressed by the State and other social actors, are related to three polarizations of the human experience, which are immersed in culture and social structure, in the law and in value systems.

The male-female polarity is reflected in many issues such as the nature of the couple's pact, how much role difference is appropriate; inheritance laws; family violence; and how much parenting needs to be exercised by each gender. This last item is a social policy issue that impinges, for example, on parental leave and family leave policies.

The adult-child polarity is reflected in the relative socio-legal rights of each side over the other, both in normal circumstances and in special ones such as adoption, family breakdown and family violence - a question in which States, and even the United Nations, have recently been intervening.

The polarity of individual freedoms versus the intensely united family presents us with ideological positions, and unspoken assumptions about this polarity have a great deal of influence upon social policy in regards to marriage, new forms of family, taxation, social welfare, social security policies and benefits, home care for the elderly, and so on. In some of the countries of the region, the marriage bond has become a device for ensuring the happiness of the individual contracting parties. Perhaps this polarity is a special case of the perennial "self" versus "other" dichotomy, which I shall not go into here except to note that even the formation of a "self" and of the first "self-other" relationships is usually determined with the family.

It is inevitable that we face our own countries' positions on these three polarities during the coming International Year of the Family, for humankind is recreating itself and its own future through the family, and we would be simply stumbling blindly if we did not take stock of where we are going, where we want to go, and what we want to be on this journey to the future.

During the Malta meeting, we reflected on the extent to which our region - Europe and North America - finds itself on a different point in the balance of each of these polarities when compared to other regions. But the balance is changing in all regions of the world and the search for a new balance continues, with interregional influence through the communications media and population movements such as migration, tourism and refugees. Whether we like it or not and whether we are worthy of it or not, our region's fashions and convictions on all these polarities often make us leaders - and, not infrequently, scapegoats - to journalists, politicians and television viewers in other regions of the world. And so, whether we are blazing new trails or reaching back respectfully to learn from the other regions, we have grave responsibilities for the future of the world.

It is interesting and important to see that in each of these polarities - male-female, child-adult and individual-family - harmony is achieved not by one extreme nor even by the balance or mean of opposite poles. Rather, harmony is achieved in such a framework that fulfilment or development in one pole is, in some sense, brought about through the other pole rather than by some jealous opposition to it. This idea does not exclude creative conflict, as it accommodates those conflicts that are aimed at establishing this special kind of balance and of removing obstacles to it.

To illustrate this from the polarity of individual freedoms versus the intensely united family, we see that individualism often has a dark side of loneliness, soaring divorce rates, alienation and so on, while intensely united families often have their dark side of possessiveness and intolerance of individual freedom, rights and dignity. The minimization of these dark sides occurs not in some happy mean or half-way path between the two extremes, but in a situation where it is the close family that explicitly tries to fulfil itself by bringing its individual members to self-realization and the fulfilment of their potentials and freedoms; and where, conversely, it is the individual person who tries to fulfil herself or himself by contributing to the care and development of the family.

The achievement of this "one-pole-in-another" harmony is sometimes a matter of education and role models, and in other cases it is a matter of social structures

and policies that provide the correct incentives and mechanisms. But this science of harmony seems well on the way to being lost from public view as far as the family is concerned, and many societal trends in our region and the world constantly remind us that we have to renew our public allegiance to it in order to ensure the world of a future - a human future.

The family is the focus in which the State, through its social and educational policies, can delicately and wisely use such a science of harmony in order to help form the next generations and the peaceful, united humankind which is the ideal of the United Nations. A loving family is the place where many fortunate people intuitively learn such a science of harmony, but in regards to those many cases of families and communities in which the harmony was never attempted or where violent or coercive forces have broken it down, societies and States should show and encourage compassion.

During the Malta meeting, it was confirmed that the days of arbitrary authority are gone from our region. In promoting the family, there is no turning back the clock: The old family regime must be replaced by one in which there is a new high level of interpersonal and shared responsibility. Families and their young, adult and aged members must have incentives and encouragement to move towards a responsive autonomy. The achievement and exercise of this autonomy requires love and compassion in families. Governments and social planners must be careful to ensure that their social policies do not erode these values or give counter-incentives to them.

But the achievement and exercise of responsive autonomy also demands certain skills which must be made available through education in life skills and parenting; the participation of various members in family management and of families in local community affairs; and in wider socio-political processes. Real participation can be enhanced by the orientation of the legal system, the design of various social development and social welfare programmes, and non-governmental organizations.

Self-help, community-based action, self-esteem and confidence are central to empowerment. Some of this self-esteem in families with problems can come from their being encouraged and enabled to help other families. This is a technique some social workers use. And empowerment is infectious - it is passed on. All this mobilizes previously unused resources and will accelerate progress on the road to a caring society.

In the words of Aeschylus: "It is easy when we are prosperous to give advice to the afflicted." Alienated youth, abandoned or abused children, disabled family members, battered women, inadequate parents, single parents, widows and the elderly must especially be empowered with skills, social recognition and the physical and economic means to fulfil their human potential and to help others who are in need. Effective rehabilitation programmes are needed. Families must be empowered with understandings, skills and sensitivity so that they can accept these special categories of persons as fully participating members, and programmes of research and action must be set up to identify and eradicate the causes of such problems.

Whole families in distress, such as the 44 million refugees and uprooted people; families in need of counsel or in trauma; families living in destitution; and families living in fear or under racial discrimination or xenophobia cry out for our professional and compassionate support, continually and not just in 1994. But during the International Year of the Family, let us be responsible for the creation, evaluation and improvement of preventive and curative programmes and institutions that support these families in distress, as well as programmes and structures that help ordinary families to move towards responsive autonomy and the united and peaceful humankind of the future for which we all wish for this small planet.

At Valletta, we have set ourselves an ambitious programme of action, a programme which indicates that every year should be dedicated to the family, since 1994, the International Year of the Family, will come and go. At the end of this year, we can either celebrate a new beginning or mourn an opportunity lost. The family, as the basic social unit of all societies, has always been and remains vital to our global future. This fundamental recognition must be mirrored in a continued commitment to concerted action at the international level and a viable follow-up in the United Nations programme on families in the development process. At Valletta, we witnessed the evidence that such a commitment is possible and necessary. We predict that this commitment will be shared by the entire family of nations.

The PRESIDENT: I now call on the Permanent Representative of the People's Republic of China, who will speak on behalf of the host country of the Asia and Pacific Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family.

Mr. LI Zhaoxing (China) *(interpretation from Chinese):* It is a great honour for me to speak here today as the representative of the host country of the Asia and Pacific Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family.

We are pleased to note that since the adoption of resolution 44/82 by the General Assembly at its forty-fourth session, a number of activities have been carried out in various regions to prepare for and celebrate the United Nations International Year of the Family proclaimed by that resolution.

At the invitation of the Chinese Government, the Asia and Pacific Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family was held in Beijing from 24 to 28 May 1993. Participants in the meeting included representatives or observers from 26 countries and regions, 17 United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations; and officials from United Nations Headquarters, the United Nations Office in Vienna, and the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP).

At the meeting, Mr. Sokalski, Coordinator for the International Year of the Family, and Mr. Roy, Chief of the Social Development Division of ESCAP, read out, respectively, telegrammes of congratulation from Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, United Nations Secretary-General, and Mr. Ahmed, Executive Secretary of ESCAP. The Chinese Government attaches great importance to that meeting. Madame Peng Peiyun, State Councillor and Chairman of the Commission on the Work of Women and Children of the State Council, spoke at the meeting on behalf of the Chinese Government, and Madame Chen Muhua, Vice-Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, delivered a statement at the closing ceremony.

At the meeting, extensive and lively discussions were conducted on such issues as families in the Asia and Pacific region, preparations for and commemorative activities relating to the Year by countries in the region and by the region as a whole, and follow-up actions. China and many other countries pledged donations to the Voluntary Fund for the Year. The meeting also adopted the Beijing Declaration on the Family in Asia and the Pacific and a report containing 52 recommendations. In the course of the meeting, participants also made field visits to the Capital Iron and Steel Complex and its living quarters in Beijing and visited some families there to get firsthand information. The meeting was both successful and fruitful and won high praise from the participants and the relevant departments of the United Nations. As the host country, we feel greatly honoured to have been able to contribute to the success of the meeting.

The Beijing Declaration, adopted at that meeting, reaffirmed that the family is the fundamental unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State. It emphasized that every family is entitled to adequate resources and basic services to ensure the well-being of each of its members and, consequently, a life of quality for the family as a whole. It also stressed that gender equality, particularly equal opportunity for women as regards employment, and the sharing of parental responsibilities between men and women, should be essential elements of a family policy.

In the Declaration all of the Governments in the ESCAP region were urged to formulate or adjust their policies, plans and programmes in accordance with the recommendations contained in the report of the meeting, promote family development, strengthen the role and functions of the family in development, further intensify their preparations for the Year, and undertake appropriate activities in commemoration of the Year. It also asked those Governments that had not yet ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child to do so without delay and to adopt measures to implement these Conventions. We believe that all the achievements of the meeting will play an important role in enhancing the activities in commemoration of the Year carried out by the Asia-Pacific countries and in strengthening the development of the family, thus promoting social progress and economic development.

The Government of China has always attached great importance to the role of the family and, in accordance with conditions in China, we have launched many family-related activities, such as the setting of standards for model families and the promotion of family values. All of these activities have helped improve the quality of the family and its members. We consider that the family is the nucleus of society and that it has multifaceted social functions.

China has more than 200 million families. Management of a State and management of a family are complementary, and happy and harmonious families are without question conducive to the maintenance of social stability, the development of civilization, the promotion of reform and development, and the enhancement of the strength of the nation and the quality of life of its people. Therefore the Chinese Government appreciates and supports the United Nations International Year of the Family, approves of its purposes and principles and is willing to participate actively in various commemorative activities and follow-up actions. We have set up a national commission for the Year and have formulated a national plan, which is being vigorously implemented.

Countries in the Asia-Pacific region and other regions have done a great deal of work in preparation for the celebration of the Year. I wish to congratulate them, and I should like once again to express my sincere hope that

the work of the International Year of the Family in 1994 will be crowned with success.

The PRESIDENT: I now call on the First Lady of the Republic of Colombia, Her Excellency Ana Milena Muñoz de Gaviria, who will speak on behalf of the host country of the Latin America and the Caribbean Preparatory Meeting for the International Year of the Family.

Mrs. MUÑOZ DE GAVIRIA (Colombia) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: I am here today as a member of the Latin American and the Caribbean family to present the results of our work in connection with the subject of the family, and also to submit to you the Declaration adopted at the regional meeting which took place in the city of Cartagena last August, with the co-sponsorship of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Government of Colombia.

Having great ethnic diversity and cultural heterogeneity, our countries have a wide range of family structures and dynamics. We speak different languages; we are different: but we have many things in common. The majority of our countries share trends that affect the composition, the structure and the functioning of families: demographic transition, poverty, inequities in the distribution of income, rapid socio-cultural change, and the progressive transformation of the role of the State.

Throughout most of Latin America, the debt crisis, the exhaustion of the import substitution model in the 1980s - which led to low and negative growth rates and to an economic recession - and subsequent adjustment processes in the 1990s resulted in increased poverty. This is reflected in an erosion of real wages, in increased unemployment and in reduced investment in the social sphere. Some 44 per cent of the region's population is living in poverty. That situation led to an increase in the number of women participating in the labour force, while at the same time not relinquishing their non-remunerated domestic work. In addition, other family members, youths and children, also entered the labour force.

Despite this rise in the family labour force, total household income decreased by 10 per cent, affecting consumption patterns, which became centred principally round food, leaving basic needs such as health, education and housing unmet.

In general terms, it can be stated that the increase in poor families in the region led to a rapid transformation of traditional family models, with the subsequent breakdown of historical gender roles.

Today there are very many children and youths working, as can be seen in the increase in school dropout rates, street children, child prostitution and juvenile delinquency. All this calls for the adoption of programmes which, within the framework of plans of action in support of children, contribute to addressing these situations that undermine their rights and reduce their chances for dignified integration into society and the development process.

Though average family size has decreased, that decrease is not evident in the lowest strata of the population. Low educational levels, early initiation into sexual activity and early pregnancies result in a greater probability of bearing more children and not having a permanent partner, thus limiting job performance and propagating poverty.

On the other hand, a greater number of women are entering the labour force, filling at one and the same time the role of provider, anchor and authority figure in the family. This multiplicity of roles can engender destructive behaviour and violence within the family. Similarly, many other women act as heads of family and main providers of income, and it is they who bear the children.

Under these circumstances, our task was to promote agreement between Governments not only on a policy statement reflecting the region's priorities on this subject of such meaningful community, social and political relevance, but also on a document that, based on the identification of our common problems, would set some guidelines that would serve as a framework for government action in each country.

In its capacity as host country, Colombia proposed to go beyond the guidelines of the United Nations and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) by sponsoring a preparatory meeting in Bogotá. That meeting took place in June of this year. Representatives discussed, according to their national assessments, the possible guidelines for a regional policy. The results were discussed and analysed in a technical meeting prior to the governmental one where the Cartagena Declaration and the Regional Proposal for the Elaboration of Action Guidelines in Support of the Families of Latin America and the Caribbean were finally adopted.

The Cartagena Declaration expresses the will of Governments to work towards the formulation of policies promoting the integrated development of the family within the framework of the International Year of the Family and the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Conference on Women, and the World Summit for Social Development. The Regional

Proposal for the Elaboration of Guidelines in Support of the Families of Latin America and the Caribbean is intended to serve as a guide for making the principles of the Declaration operational.

The spheres of action agreed upon by the participating countries included the following components: making the family a focal point of our economic and social development policies; reviewing legislation in order to guarantee the rights of all family members and access to the judicial system; strengthening governmental and private support services, research and human resource development; and promoting communication and information strategies. We also agreed to give impetus to cultural-development policies that would revitalize the family unit, taking into account ethnic and cultural diversity. We hope the joint international cooperative effort to put the family at the centre of our policies within all countries will become a movement in reaffirmation of the regional integration processes we have been promoting.

Finally, the International Year of the Family is seen by the 23 participating countries as a call to Governments and societies to define lasting policies and programmes that will strengthen the family as the most fundamental unit of society.

We understand that not all the problems and needs of the family are economic ones that can be solved with money. Sustained action is necessary to preserve and promote such values as respect, mutual aid and tolerance, which are essential to ensure harmony in the family and in society.

Allow me to emphasize once again three basic themes that have been analysed both at Cartagena and in other international forums in recent months: the role of the communications media, of education and of parents in the family.

The media, especially television, have a socializing and motivating effect on individual and collective behaviour, roles and patterns in the family, especially for the new generations. Without any doubt, television is one of the most economical and widespread forms of recreation. Therefore, there is an ever-growing exposure to its messages and the tendency to imitate them. The frustrations that are engendered, owing in great part to the impossibility of satisfying aspirations to consumption at the level depicted in the media, find an easy outlet in violent behaviour that is repeated irresponsibly and is presented as normal.

Deceit, extortion, infidelity, corruption, fraud, pornography, violence and verbal and physical aggression are the most frequent themes in the media. It is imperative that the State, while safeguarding freedom of expression, promote improvement of the quality of broadcasts through systems of self-regulation and citizen participation and that it exercise responsible vigilance. We also know that it is important to strengthen the concept that parents bear primary responsibility for their children and that the responsibility of the State and society is to contribute to that task, not to take the place of parents in the fulfilment of their obligations.

While the family remains the primary centre of emotional life and the fundamental carrier of the basic ethical and moral notions of life, formal education complements this task of strengthening values. That is why it is imperative that children attend school and stay in the educational system. In the scholastic curriculum we need to strengthen the emphasis on values such as loyalty, fidelity, mutual support and affection as indispensable elements for stability and peace within the family.

Latin America and the Caribbean have made technical and academic efforts; now we must move into action. We do not want the International Year of the Family to be just another celebration; rather, we want our commitment to make a real contribution to changing the living conditions of our families.

This opportunity must be seized to ensure that, through its various organs, the United Nations, in its efforts to modernize and maximize existing resources, supports the proposals and initiatives of the countries of the region and channels new resources to that end.

I did not come here to make just another speech in this Hall, where many voices and proposals are heard. I want my words to demonstrate the commitment of our region to its peoples, of our countries to their inhabitants and of millions of human beings to improving their living conditions and those of future generations. I am certain that this commitment by our Governments, communities, civil society and churches to participate actively in this process must be a commitment shared by all and that it must be renewed each and every day.

We cannot ignore the fact that the conditions for peace and democracy in our countries, as well as in countries in other regions, are predicated to a large extent on the peace of the family, and the peace of the family depends on meeting the basic needs of its members. We know that social imbalances caused by inequity in the distribution of goods or the lack or nonexistence of services are some of most destabilizing factors in countries, factors that make them difficult to govern.

Simón Bolívar, the liberator, said that the best system of government is the one that produces the greatest possible happiness, the greatest social well-being and the greatest political stability. When the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean improve the quality of life of families and provide greater social security, they will be marching towards the conquest of the happiness and peace that are desired so much and that are essential for the stability and development of our nations.

The PRESIDENT: In order that we may proceed to the special non-governmental-organization segment of our programme scheduled for this morning, I propose that we hear the remaining speakers for the present meeting after that segment, for which special logistical arrangements have been made.

I shall now suspend the meeting and shall immediately have the honour of presiding over the special segment devoted to the community of non-governmental organizations and its activities in support of the International Year of the Family.

The meeting was suspended at 12.10 p.m. and resumed at 1.05 p.m.

The PRESIDENT: We shall now hear the remaining speaker on the occasion of the launching of the International Year of the Family.

I call on the representative of Angola, His Excellency Mr. Afonso Van Dunem "Mbinda", who will speak on behalf of the African Group.

Mr. VAN DUNEM "MBINDA" (Angola): It is a great honour for me to address the Assembly on behalf of the African Group on this important occasion as we celebrate the launching of the International Year of the Family, which will last throughout 1994.

Allow me, first of all, to reiterate our appreciation for the way in which you, Mr. President, have led the work of this forty-eighth session of the General Assembly. I also wish to congratulate the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros-Ghali, for the comprehensive and detailed report we have before us in document A/48/293.

The African continent attaches particular importance to the celebration of the International Year of the Family because it will be a starting-point for the definition and implementation of strategies for greater integration of the African family into society. In fact, the African Governments have shown a practical commitment to that goal, as illustrated in the Tunis Declaration, adopted at the Preparatory Meeting held from 29 March to 2 April 1993 in Tunisia, which contains the guidelines on the direction the continent is to take in order to ensure the protection and development of the family.

On the other hand, the fact that various African countries have in considerable number already established national coordination mechanisms, drafted their respective national action programmes and set up national liaison centres to serve as the liaison to the Secretariat, within the framework of the International Year of the Family, also reflects their firm commitment *vis-à-vis* the problems of the family.

Such engagements are part of the efforts that the African Governments have made lately in the social area. Although such efforts have already produced some positive and encouraging results, they are being hampered by the severe economic and financial crisis facing the continent, by political and military instability and by natural disasters such as drought and the constant influx of refugees and displaced persons. These negative factors have contributed to the increasing lack of participation of the African family in society and the deterioration of its living conditions, as well as the suspension or non-materialization of numerous programmes with social impact.

If this trend is to be reversed, there is a need for an increase in human, material and financial resources and for better coordination of programmes and development policies, not only at the national and local levels but also at the regional and international levels. Although the Governments are the main sponsors of these efforts, the United Nations, its specialized agencies and the non-governmental organizations must also play an important role.

The family, as a fundamental nuclear group, has an essential and irreplaceable role to play in any society in the maintenance of sustainable development at every level. It should be given wide support by the State, which must endeavour to eliminate poverty and indigence by providing adequate health care - including medical assistance, medicine and food to the needy - and to protect the legal rights of its people.

Special attention must be given to the children, the most vulnerable group. Although the number of countries that have already ratified the international Convention on the Rights of the Child is quite encouraging and shows their commitment to protecting children and their lives, there is still a long way to go until all children's rights have been fully recognized.

The armed conflicts that plague many parts of the world - in Africa - particularly in Angola, Somalia and

Liberia - represent a further threat to the rights of the child. Therefore, we share the views of the Committee on the Rights of the Child as set forth in its recommendation for the adoption of measures to provide assistance to children in war zones.

We have little time in which to say many things, so I will be brief.

The successes achieved in the preparation of the International Year of the Family are numerous and justify the highest expectations for the implementation of the national action programmes. However, we are concerned that in many countries - those affected by war or ethnic strife - no action has yet been taken to observe the occasion of the celebration of the International Year of the Family. We are equally concerned by the lack of funds and human resources available to the Secretariat for the activities of the Year.

Therefore, the African Group fully supports the recommendations contained in the report to ensure that the International Year of the Family attains its goals, namely: promotion of the International Year by the observing countries, at the national and local levels, with full participation by all segments of society; specific support for and implementation of development policies and programmes, and support for institutional development and family law; and follow-up of the Year and development of long-term strategies to guide future actions of support for the family.

The African Group also associates itself with the recommendations made by the agencies in charge of the preparation and coordination of the Year, in which they request from the Secretary-General, *inter alia*, the formulation of follow-up measures and the presentation of a report, at the fiftieth session of the General Assembly, on the celebration of the International Year at the national, regional and international levels.

Before I conclude, I wish to commend the non-governmental organizations for the efforts they have made. They have played a leading role in taking charge of the preparations for the celebration of the Year, in supporting the efforts of the Secretariat of the International Year of the Family, including its efforts to pursue a media and awareness campaign, and in providing organizational assistance.

Our appreciation goes also to the intergovernmental organizations, which also have spared no effort in disseminating information, holding meetings and seminars and providing advice on the devising of policies aimed at the success of the International Year of the Family.

The PRESIDENT: I now call on the representative of Japan, His Excellency Mr. Shunji Maruyama, who will speak on behalf of the Asian Group.

Mr. MARUYAMA (Japan): On behalf of the Asian Group, I have the pleasure of addressing this plenary meeting of the General Assembly on the occasion of the launching of the International Year of the Family.

Before commencing my remarks, I should like to express my appreciation to Mr. Henryk J. Sokalski, Coordinator for the International Year of the Family, for overseeing the preparations for this important undertaking so successfully.

It is universally recognized that the family is the basic unit of society. It is a major agent of social development, with a critically important role to play in promoting the well-being of the larger social entities that are built on it. Everywhere, the family provides financial, emotional and other support to its members, particularly children, working adults and the aged, which is why it must in turn have the protection and support of society and the State, as stipulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Family structure and functions are affected by social and economic development and by cultural factors, including the roles that men, women and children play in society. Many of the changes that are now taking place are therefore having an adverse effect, particularly on the disadvantaged. The International Year of the Family is a valuable opportunity to enhance awareness of the needs of the family. As the efforts of the United Nations in the area of social development will remain inadequate so long as it fails to address in a direct manner the problems and concerns of the family, the activities it is promoting in connection with the Year are a welcome indication that it intends to become more actively involved in this area.

In Asia, nations differ widely with respect to size, climate, culture and level of development, and consequently so too does family structure. Everywhere, however, social stability and economic progress have been built on the foundation the family provides. One might even suggest that the state of the family is a reliable indicator of the state of the society.

Today, in all parts of the world, there is a trend towards smaller families, which perhaps diminishes the ability of this basic social group to care for its members, particularly children and the elderly. Throughout Asia, despite the great diversity of its cultural, social and economic conditions, the nuclear family is becoming more common, replacing to some extent the large, extended family which had been the norm. Given the rapid changes

that have taken place at the local and national levels in the course of development, States must accordingly devote additional attention to adopting national policies and programmes that will ensure the well-being of the family.

It is of particular importance to formulate a programme that will enhance respect for the rights, responsibilities and contributions of all family members by promoting the principle of gender equality, and in particular the equal sharing of family responsibilities by men and women. This principle must be more widely recognized than it is at present, when a growing number of women are entering the labour market. If the family is to continue to play a vital role in society, the burden of its work must be distributed more equitably between men and women. In order to ensure that family life continues to be nurturing and loving, responsibilities must be shared. The democratic family is truly the cradle of the democratic society; this is the idea behind the slogan of the International Year, "The Smallest Democracy at the Heart of Society." Children must be taught by their parents and other family members, from the time they are old enough to understand, the basic principle of human rights: that all people are created equal.

I have the pleasure of noting that the preparatory work for the International Year of the Family has been carried out efficiently, greatly enhancing the chances that the Year's objectives will be achieved. At their Preparatory Meeting, representatives of Asian and Pacific nations adopted the Beijing Declaration on the Family, which includes a request that Governments direct their policies, plans and programmes towards promoting family development and towards strengthening the role and the functions of the family in contributing to national development. The nations of Asia and the Pacific further recognize the important contributions of the non-governmental organizations in promoting the role of the family in development and have devoted particular attention to the role and status of women within the family.

In conclusion, I wish to say that the nations of Asia are committed to achieving a successful outcome of the International Year of the Family. We are convinced that the family must play an increasingly important role if generations to come are to live their lives to the fullest, in safety and health, in stable and supportive communities and nations. To do this, it is in turn necessary for the members of the family to form a partnership based on mutual respect. We pledge our active participation in the activities during the Year and look forward to gaining a new understanding of this most fundamental of all social institutions, whose welfare is critical to the future of society. We expect that the international conference on families, to be held a year from now, will provide us with an opportunity to evaluate the activities we shall undertake from now on and to propose the most appropriate follow-up measures.

The PRESIDENT: I now call on the representative of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Eastern European States.

Mr. MALESKI (the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia): I have the honour, on behalf of the members of the Group of Eastern European States, to congratulate you, Mr. President, and the Assembly on the launching of the International Year of the Family, and to pledge the full support of the Group and of my delegation for this noble cause.

At the outset, allow me to express my appreciation for the inspiring and systematic report (A/48/293) of the Secretary-General, Mr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, which serves both as an important source of information on the subject and as an inspiring set of guidelines for future action.

This is an opportune time to pay a well-deserved tribute to the 102 countries that have established their national coordinating committees and similar mechanisms for the Year, the 90 countries that have initiated the observance of the Year, and the 90 Governments that have designated national focal points to maintain liaison with the Secretariat of the United Nations for the Year.

The non-governmental sector has continued and reinforced its pioneering role through its significant partnership in the preparations for the Year, serving as an effective advocate and vital force in generating and implementing concrete measures.

Our congratulations go to the academic and research institutions that are continuing to make specific plans to prepare for and observe the Year and to the private sector for its support of the cause.

Throughout history, the family has outlived numerous forms of social organization and has remained the basic unit of society. In times of crisis - when empires fall, when countries tear themselves apart or when personal liberty is threatened - individuals turn to the family for comfort and strength. Living amid collapsing State structures, many in Eastern Europe have understood the real value of some basic truths: peace, family, a happy childhood and a roof over one's head.

Technically, human society has advanced so much that we can look forward to a future in which the material needs of families will be fully satisfied. But the horrors of

ethnic strife, which are a reality in Eastern Europe today, clearly demonstrate that scientific advancement has nothing to do with moral progress. While each succeeding generation can claim that it is technically more advanced than the previous generation, that cannot be said of humanity's moral dimension.

What should our reaction to this unpleasant fact of life be? The answer is that every generation must start with the alphabet of moral behaviour, and the first lessons we get are in the family.

The PRESIDENT: I now call on the representative of Ecuador, who will speak on behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean Group.

Mr. PONCE (Ecuador) *(interpretation from Spanish)*: Combining academic rigour and deep feeling, Mrs. Ana Milena Muñoz de Gaviria, First Lady of Colombia, presented to the Assembly the results of the regional preparatory meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean for the International Year of the Family. The proposals and guidelines of the Cartagena Declaration chart the course to be followed by the States of the region in their common effort to strengthen the role of the family.

Our region draws strength from the cultural values of our indigenous communities and from the African and European contributions that for five centuries have enriched our multi-ethnic, pluri-cultural societies. In the past, the family was the basic nucleus of our societies, and today it is an important mechanism for helping solve the complex problems afflicting our nations.

The economic difficulties we are going through - the result, in large measure, of an unjust international economic order in which we are burdened with heavy external-debt servicing and trade relations in which protectionism refuses to go away - have not been resolved through the economic readjustment policies we have adopted. Unemployment, the massive incorporation of women into the labour market, and child labour are other elements of our economic reality that affect the transformation of the structure and the role of the family in our social relations.

To these economic factors have been added cultural phenomena. Among other things, the increase in the number of families supported solely by women, sustained high rates of rural migration, and the spread of models of consumption that undermine ethical values and solidarity, with the violence that results therefrom, have affected the role traditionally played by the family in the societies of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Parallel with these processes, there have been social movements in our region that show the capacity of the neediest sectors, and especially of women, to adopt survival strategies based on solidarity. Neighbourhood associations, parents' associations, environmental-protection associations and others have widened their field of action and now constitute important groups to which our Governments are paying more and more attention in the development of meaningful social programmes. Coordinated action by our States, backed by international cooperation, including the valuable contribution of non-governmental organizations, as is stated in the Cartagena Declaration, will make it possible for our peoples' creativity to be channelled in defence of the family as a fundamental means of strengthening the ethical education of our citizens and the coherence of our societies.

On behalf of the members of the Latin American and Caribbean Group, I have the honour to reaffirm the commitment of the Governments of Latin America and the Caribbean to the objectives inspiring the proclamation of 1994 as the International Year of the Family.

The PRESIDENT: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Pedro Catarino of Portugal, who will speak on behalf of the Group of Western European and Other States.

Mr. CATARINO (Portugal): I have the honour to speak in my capacity as Chairman of the Group of Western European and Other States for the current month of December.

The decision to proclaim 1994 the International Year of the Family was taken exactly four years ago, in General Assembly resolution 44/82. By that resolution the Assembly established the basic principles and objectives for the International Year. It also decided that the major activities for the observance of the Year should be concentrated at the local, regional and national levels, with the assistance of the United Nations and its system of organizations, with the goal of creating among Governments, policy makers and the public at large a greater awareness of the family as the natural and fundamental unit of society.

Since the proclamation of the Year, an intense and comprehensive preparatory process has been carried out at all levels. The continuity and promotion of the whole process was assured by the professional, competent and dedicated action of the Coordinator for the Year, appointed by the Secretary-General in 1990, and of the small organizational secretariat that assisted him. To Mr. Sokalski and his collaborators goes our sincere appreciation for their hard work and for the large part they have played in the success of the preparations for the Year.

Substantive direction for that process was provided by successive sessions of the General Assembly, while the Economic and Social Council served as coordinating body and the Commission for Social Development was designated the preparatory body for the Year. Many other bodies and agencies participated actively in the process, thus ensuring a system-wide approach to the preparation and observance of the Year.

The role played by non-governmental organizations in this process was also of paramount importance, and it is no exaggeration to say that a fair share of the success of the Year will be the direct result of their contributions.

The level of adherence to the preparatory process at the national level was probably the best demonstration of the interest in this initiative. At least 102 countries have established national coordinating committees or similar mechanisms, and at least 90 have initiated national programmes for the observance of the Year. We must ensure - and that will be one of the challenges of the forthcoming celebrations - that those national programmes result in commitments that will be translated into concrete actions and long - term strategies in favour of families. In this context, the full application of already existing instruments relevant to the subject should be one of the principal aims of the International Year.

We must indeed ensure that all the ideas, recommendations, programmes and commitments that have already been, and will surely continue to be, put forward will lead to concrete actions and measures, ones that will have a positive and long-lasting effect in the promotion of the principles and objectives of the International Year.

Our basic aim will be to promote the widest possible protection and assistance to families, in all their diverse forms, as the basic unit of society, so that they may fully assume their responsibilities within the community, ensuring at the same time the promotion of equal and full enjoyment of human rights by all family members, with special emphasis on the equal rights, responsibilities and participation of women.

It has frequently been said that the family, being the natural and fundamental group unit of society, is the fullest reflection of the strengths and weaknesses of a community. As such, the family is the ideal model of social issues, and constitutes the ideal framework for an integrated and comprehensive approach to social policies. The promotion of a strong, democratic and dynamic family is an important element in the construction of an equally strong, democratic and dynamic society.

In this spirit, we look forward to the wide spectrum of measures that are planned in various countries, as well as those being developed at the regional and international levels, for the observance of the Year. We are convinced that they will constitute important achievements in the promotion of the objectives of the Year. But in order to ensure their full success, it is of paramount importance that the concerns and basic principles that animated the preparation, launching and observance of the Year be maintained beyond the year 1994 and that they be at the centre of follow-up programmes. The International Year of the Family should not be an end in itself; on the contrary, it should constitute the starting-point of a long-term process.

The PRESIDENT: We have now heard the last speaker on the occasion of the launching of the International Year of the Family.

May I, before closing the plenary meeting, acknowledge the receipt, yesterday, of a message from the Vatican, addressed to me in my capacity as President of the Assembly, in which His Holiness Pope John Paul II sends his cordial good wishes to those present at the opening ceremony and to all who support this initiative of the International Year of the Family, which will serve the well-being of families throughout the world. Copies of the letter will be made available to delegations and to the press.

This concludes the plenary meeting held for the purpose of launching the International Year of the Family.

I solemnly declare the International Year of the Family launched.

The meeting rose at 1.35 p.m.